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# BULLETIN

OF

## THE PENNSYLVANIA MUSEUM

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### **"ANNA SELBDRITT" GROUP OF THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY AND FRENCH MADONNA OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY**

A curiously archaic wood carving representing Anne, the Virgin, and the Holy Child, was recently acquired by the Museum, through the generosity of Mrs. John Harrison. It is now on exhibition in the Gothic alcove that bears her name.

The group (height two feet, six inches) is of the well-known mediæval Flemish and German type in which Anne seated bears on her right knee the seated Madonna, who in turn on her left knee holds the Standing Child. The latter's left hand is extended and strokes his mother's chin. The wood is covered with gesso, the painting on which has been restored, especially in this the case with the red color, of which little remains of the original. The blue is better preserved.

It was represented, when purchased, as Italian. But the motive is usual in Flanders and in Germany where variants of the group are known as "Anna Selbdritts." And although the gesture of the Child recalls the delectable little early Madonna and Child in the gallery of Perugia, in which the Child looks up into the face of his mother and seizes her chin with his hand, one can hardly escape from the conclusion that our group belongs to the "Anna Selbdritt" series of Flemish and German fourteenth century carvings of which one is in the South Kensington Museum. There it is attributed to England and must be as late as 1495-1520, judging from the dress of the figures. Alfred Maskell, in his admirable work on "Wood Carving," however, does not hesitate to assign it to the same provenance as the example in the Erfurt Cathedral, which is by Riemen-scheider or his school; and as another specimen in the Bavarian National Museum. Indeed, the type is by no means uncommon. The original idea of representing in art Anne teaching her daughter to read was German. The two women are alone over a book. By a curious inconsistency there was derived from this an elaboration by which the Virgin was shown sitting or standing on her seated mother's lap as in our example. holding the Child standing on her left knee.

Until the thirteenth century the Madonna usually was represented alone—"A figure of hieratic dignity; the chosen one amongst all by the Almighty." In time, her head was turned toward the Child sitting on her lap. In the thirteenth century she is represented as the loving mother. In the early examples the Child is usually clothed. The earliest groups in which he appears unclothed



"ANNA SELBDRITT" GROUP  
Flemish or German Fourteenth Century  
Gift of Mrs. John Harrison

to the waist do not occur until the middle of the fourteenth century. After that date he is usually quite naked. It is also about this time that he is first seen at the breast, especially in England. Toward the end of the century the early mediæval thought of triumphant queenship is replaced by the expression of human motherhood.

In the ivories of the Cluny Museum the Child either sits, or as in our example, stands on the mother's left knee, instead of being held, as in the later case, in her arms. In Hamburg also there are examples of such disposal. Another interesting point is the treatment of the Child's hair, which, as well as the pose and general character, brings this group en rapport with the examples of the fourteenth century.

While St. Anne, the mother of Mary, does not appear in any of the Gospels, she is a common subject in legendary art and her legend is given in the "Apocryphal Gospel of the Life of Mary." There, she is mentioned as the wife of Joachim of Nazareth, who after twenty years of sterility brought forth a daughter whose birth and high destiny were miraculously announced to her and to Joachim by an angel. When Mary was born, her parents brought her to the temple and dedicated her to the Lord; and, according to the

same tradition, her betrothal to Joseph was accompanied by miraculous manifestations.

Another Madonna carved of wood, but of the French School, also has recently been acquired by the Museum. It measures three feet, four inches in height and probably belongs to the fifteenth century. The more classical lines of the face and the grace of the folds of the drapery show it to be a product of a more advanced art. There is no vestige of color on the figure. If ever colored, it has

been washed clean, and no trace of it remains. On the face, however, which is covered with a finely polished brown patina, there are certain uneven surfaces that lead one to suspect that a priming of some kind was used. The face beneath its bare wood draperies now comes out dark and smoothly polished with attractive effect. But a doubt arises as to its original condition.

The Child here also is fully clothed after the usual archaic fashion noted above as prevalent until the middle of the fourteenth century. No example exists before that time of the Child being represented unclothed even to the waist, as after this date he begins to appear. This might incline one to give the group an earlier date were it not for the treatment of the hair, which is rather more curled than it is apt to be in earlier similar groups.

One arm of the Virgin has been broken off at the elbow; and both the hands of the Child also are missing, as well as some of the toes which protruded below the dress. The left side of the statue is broken off, where the seat and drapery probably appeared as on the other side. This leaves exposed a rough surface showing considerable decay. Indeed, in the entire statue the wood shows evidence of great age, save in the head of the Virgin, which seems to have been wonderfully preserved, probably by the application of some sort of priming or varnish, as described above. It is altogether an extremely fine piece of early wood-sculpture.

S. Y. S.



CARVED WOOD MADONNA  
Late Fifteenth Century



### METAL WORK RECENTLY ACQUIRED

There have been added to the collection of English pewter of the eighteenth century a mustard pot, a covered tankard and an oval platter or meat dish measuring twenty-five inches in length, with a movable drainer, perforated in an unusually handsome pattern. The platter bears the mark of John Townsend, London, dating from about 1784, and is the gift of Miss Letitia A. Humphreys.

Two bell-metal mortars, recently acquired, are notable additions to the collection of metal work. They are elaborately ornamented with amorini, scroll